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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PNAT](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: KRG HUMAN RIGHTS MINISTER DISCUSSES TRANSITION,
PRISON INSPECTIONS, AND WOMEN'S ISSUES

REF: A. KIRKUK 113

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 3254

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MICHAEL J. ADLER, FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) In an August 30 meeting, KRG Minister of Human Rights Yousif Mohammed Aziz told PolOff that the integration of the two KRG human rights ministries had proceeded smoothly (ref A) and that he was looking forward to developing the new ministry into a stronger institution. As such, he was institutionalizing a monthly public human rights report, establishing an interagency human rights council with UNAMI participation, and focusing on human rights awareness campaigns. The Ministry, with a staff of 490, is comparable in size to the national Iraqi Ministry, but operationally appears to be more developed with strong prisons and women's issue directorates. As of yet, the KRG Ministry of Human Rights has had no interaction with the national MoHR though Post has encouraged the two ministers to meet and is working to facilitate an introduction.

[1](#)2. (C) During the August 30 conversation, Minister Yousif bragged that his prison inspections directorate, with its rigorous tracking of inmate conditions and judicial status, was responsible for improvements of prison conditions in Kurdistan. He claimed that the Ministry engaged heavily with the Ministry of Justice on any inmate whose judicial status was left in question for more than six months. He added that concerns were publicly detailed in the Ministry's monthly human rights report along with accompanying recommendations. Prison Directorate officials explained to PolOff in a separate conversation August 30 that the majority of prison abuse in Kurdistan was generally a result of substandard facility conditions compounded by a deficiency of appropriate training for prison guards.

[1](#)3. (C) When asked whether the Ministry was able to inspect the secretive Asayish (anti-terrorist security service) detention facilities, the Minister replied in the negative. He said that both the PUK and KRG Asayish act under the cloak of anti-terrorism and that his ministry could not be involved in such matters. According to KDP Ministry of Interior officials, the KDP Asayish reports to the KRG Prime Minister while the PUK Asayish reports to the PUK Ministry of Interior. PolOff expressed disquiet that these facilities were not being monitored, but the minister, who is a former Peshmerga official and proponent of strong security measures, appeared unconcerned.

[1](#)4. (C) Minister Yousif noted that women's issues are among the ministry's top priorities. He explained that since the KRG did not have a Women's Ministry, it was incumbent upon the Human Rights Ministry to ensure that women's rights were protected in Kurdistan. He lamented the recent increase in honor killings (ref B) and indicated that his women's issues

directorate would be developing legislation to impose harsh punishment on individuals engaging in those practices. He said that he was developing close ties with the Human Rights Committee in Kurdistan's National Assembly to facilitate any proposed ministry legislation. (Note: the new KNA session convened September 5). In the meantime, the Ministry provides funding to Khazant women's shelter and interacts closely with the other 5 shelters located in the Kurdistan area, providing support when needed.

BIO NOTE

15. (SBU) A surgeon by training, Minister Yousif claims that he used to be one of President Talabani's physicians. A PUK member and Sulymaniya native, Minister Yousif was previously the Human Rights Minister in Sulymaniya before the merger of the two KRG ministries. He became fluent in English while in medical school, and has only sporadically left the country, most recently this past summer to meet with human rights leaders in Canada and Finland. The Minister expressed a desire to undertake a similar trip to the US.
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